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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0929
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0301

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000404

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2018

TAGS: [AJ](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY FM AZIMOV SHARPLY CRITICIZES MINSK GROUP
AND THE FRENCH CO-CHAIR IN MEETING WITH EU HEADS OF MISSION

Classified By: Ambassador Ann E. Derse per 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: According to the French Charge on April 24, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov sharply criticized the Minsk Group Co-Chairs and France in particular during an April 23 meeting with the EU heads of mission. Azimov claimed that the Co-Chairs had not made any effort to negotiate the language in Azerbaijan's UNGA resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and accused the French of trying to persuade other states to vote against it. The Charge reported that Azimov's message was in stark contrast with signals coming from Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister, suggesting some tension within the MFA on this issue. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In a conversation with the Ambassador on April 24, the French Charge said that on April 23 Azerbaijan's Deputy FM Araz Azimov summoned all of the EU heads of mission and proceeded to sharply criticize the Minsk Group's Co-Chairs, particularly France. According to the Charge, Azimov claimed that the Co-Chairs are trying to prevent the peace process from moving forward and are dictating to other states in the Minsk Group. Azimov noted that some of these other states, specifically naming Switzerland, Germany, and Turkey, might be more effective, and said Azerbaijan would continue to raise the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in a variety of fora, including GUAM, the OSCE, UN, and NATO. Azimov also suggested that French Co-Chair Bernard Fassier had worked to convince other states to vote against Azerbaijan's UNGA resolution. Despite what he called a very "undiplomatic" meeting meant to "name and shame France," the Charge noted that Azimov stopped short of suggesting the replacement of France or any of the other Co-Chairs.

13. (C) After the larger meeting broke, the French Charge approached Azimov and met with him privately to discuss the issue. The Charge explained that since France was in a position of mediating a resolution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it was unable to support Azerbaijan's UNGA resolution because it was not a neutral document. He noted that France voted with the other Co-Chairs and that Azimov should not single out one member of the group. When he mentioned that the Co-Chairs had tried to negotiate with Azerbaijan to find more neutral, mutually agreeable language, Azimov completely denied that this process had taken place. The French Charge emphasized to the Ambassador that France had tried to negotiate on this language through its UN mission in New York. Azimov also reportedly accused Fassier of having a secret pro-Armenian agenda. When the Charge asked Azimov to name a specific example, he could not. Claiming that Azimov "lies a lot," the Charge called his conversation with him a "harsh moment."

14. (C) The French Charge told the Ambassador that Azimov

achieved a "pyrrhic victory" with the UNGA vote. Although the resolution passed, he believes that Azimov may be in trouble within the Azerbaijani government for pushing a vote for the UNGA resolution that the Co-Chairs voted against. According to the Charge, the same day that Azimov criticized the Co-Chairs in front of the EU heads of mission, French Co-Chair Fassier held a "positive and constructive" telephone conversation of one hour with Azerbaijani FM Mammadyarov. According to the Charge, Mammadyarov told Fassier that President Aliyev wants to get away from "childish diplomatic games." Clearly frustrated with Azimov, the French Charge asked whether there were other officials in the Azerbaijani government that he could work with on Nagorno-Karabakh issues.

15. (C) COMMENT: The contrast between Azimov's meeting with the French Charge and the reported phone call between Fassier and Mammadyarov suggests that some tension on the UN vote and its aftermath continues within the Azerbaijani MFA. Azimov, by his own admission to the Ambassador, pushed the UNGA resolution. The Co-Chairs' vote against it has probably affected him more than any other official. Azimov likely will use diplomatic activity in other fora (the UN, OSCE, GUAM, etc.) not only to advance Azerbaijan's position with respect to NK but also to shore up his own credibility within GOAJ. END COMMENT.
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